Published on *University of Toronto Faculty Association* (https://www.utfa.org)

Report of the Vice-President, University and External Affairs, 2024–2025

April 8, 2025

The University and External Affairs (UEA) Committee has taken up three main areas of work over the last year: academic freedom, governance, and building solidarity.

Academic Freedom

Defending our members' academic freedom has been a central focus for the entire UTFA Executive, with some aspects directly related to the UEA portfolio. We collaborated with the coalition of University of Toronto Employee Associations and Unions (UTEAU) to issue a statement last November with our concerns about the "User Guide to U of T Policies on Protests." The User Guide was issued by the Vice-Provost, Students in August 2024 and remains in effect, although UTFA continues to challenge it in ongoing conversations with senior Administration.

A key question for me as VP, UEA has been the relationship between academic freedom and Bill 166. The Bill received Royal Assent in May 2024 and requires all "publicly-assisted" universities to enact policies regarding student mental health; racism and hate; and the disclosure of ancillary fees and costs of learning materials. Of particular concern is a provision in the Bill that allows the Ministry to issue directives to universities that specify the topics and procedures to be included in the policies the Bill requires. This provision represents a significant intervention into university governance. The first directives were issued in fall 2024, giving universities until January 31, 2025, to respond and included a requirement that universities establish anonymous mechanisms to report allegations of racism or hate. Senior Administration have acknowledged in Joint Committee meetings with UTFA leadership that they cannot rely upon anonymous complaints except in the most extraordinary circumstances. However, they are required by the Bill to report the frequency and general content of all complaints they receive each year, including anonymous ones.

We have also raised questions with senior Administration about the relationship between Bill 166 and an earlier Administration proposal for a "Guide to Law and Policy Regarding Antisemitism and Anti-Israeli

Discrimination." In Joint Committee meetings, Deb Cowen, Council representative for Constituency 102, argued that the term "Anti-Israeli Discrimination" has no basis in scholarship, jurisprudence, or the Ontario Human Rights Code. In a recent Joint Committee meeting, senior Administrators confirmed that they have dropped that term, in part because of the responses they received during the consultation process for their proposal.

Our collective work at UTFA has also directly contributed to discussions about Bill 166 at the Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations (OCUFA). As a member of OCUFA's Board of Directors for the Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations, I was asked to present on Bill 166 and its provisions regarding racism and hate at the May 2024 Board meeting. I was also part of a group of Board members who forwarded a motion at the fall 2024 Board meeting to strike a working group on academic freedom in relation to Bill 166. The working group includes Elizabeth Hanson (Queens University Faculty Association) and Alison Braley-Rattai (Brock University Faculty Association) and is supported by OCUFA staff members Jenny Ahn, Kimiko Inouye, and Bador

Alagraa. Kimiko and I presented the committee's first report at the winter 2025 Board meeting, detailing various strategies the OCUFA Executive has agreed to pursue to support member faculty associations in defending academic freedom in light of Bill 166.

UTFA Governance

The UTFA Executive has sustained a conversation for several years now about deepening membership engagement and promoting greater democratic participation in our organization. The UEA Committee initiated work this year on one part of this process, namely reviewing how various Executive Committees in the Canadian university sector are elected. We surveyed the bylaws of select faculty associations (i.e., Ontario's U15 FAs, other non-certified FAs, and the GTA FAs) and some other Canadian U15 FAs to understand how they constitute their respective Executive Committees. The analysis revealed that in almost all cases, the Executive Committee is directly elected by the membership (whether at an AGM or by direct vote), as opposed to UTFA's process by which the Executive is elected by Council, and only the President is elected by the membership as a whole. However, there were several stipulations that varied across FAs. For example, a few FAs have more specific rules for electing Executive members for Equity and Indigenous affairs, allowing equity-deserving and Indigenous members more input into who is allowed to stand for these positions. As well, there was considerable variation in the size of other Executives and, while most FAs have a version of a Council, not all do. In these cases, their directly elected Executive reports to general membership meetings. This work has since been rolled into a larger governance study that the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT) has been commissioned to conduct. For more details see the Report of the President.

Building Solidarity

Perhaps the most important part of the UEA portfolio is building solidarity with other labour organizations on campus and with other faculty associations. The UTFA Executive signed onto a letter in late March supporting Units 2, 3 & 7 of CUPE 3902 in their campaign for a fair deal with the University and called on our members to participate in an e-action to support their campaign. The UTFA Executive also issued a statement in support of our colleagues at the York University Faculty Association as they organize to stop planned enrolment suspensions in 19 academic programs as of this fall. The statement was also sent directly to senior administration at York University and members of their Board of Governors. As well, we

issued an appeal last July to support the Palestinian Students and Scholars at Risk Program at U of T and continue to encourage UTFA members to contact PSSAR if they are able to support a Palestinian colleague or graduate student.

In Thanks

The work of the UEA portfolio would not be possible without the expertise and support of UTFA staff, including Marisa Mikroulis, Claire Reyes, Jessica Martin and Nellie De Lorenzi. I am grateful for their contributions.

Jeff Bale

Vice-President, University and External Affairs

Source URL (modified on Apr 24 2026):https://www.utfa.org/content/report-vice-president-university-and-external-affairs-2024-2025